Editor's Note

LOOKING back, looking forward. Leadership, or perhaps the lack of it, is an ever-present theme in Bangladeshi politics. In a country that has produced so many leaders in the social, civic, intellectual, and artistic arena, we have, it seems, unaccountably been deprived of similar talent and ability when it comes to political leadership.

We bemoan the dynastic nature of the political leadership in the country, and there is no denying that dynastic leaders (as elsewhere in the world) do enjoy a distinct advantage in winning over the loyalty and affection of the general public over newer and more unfamiliar faces. There is no doubt that this is a regrettable reflection of the continuing feudal nature of our society and our inability as a people to rally together unless it is under the banner of an established brand name.

But this is not the whole story. After all, as in all other fields, dynasty is an advantage in politics, but not an insuperable one. A well-known name can only get you through the door initially, but it cannot keep you there if you fail to deliver. One might argue that Bangladesh provides the exception to this rule: our dynastic leaders have signally failed to deliver, yet they remain at the helms of their respective parties, and their failures have not translated into their political obituaries.

But this is only because credible new leadership has not arisen to challenge them. Had Bangladesh produced credible alternative leaders, then there can be little doubt that the serial failures of the existing leadership would have consigned their political careers and dynasties to oblivion.

The sad truth is that as poor as the leadership they have offered to us over the past few decades, no credible new leadership has arisen to challenge their authority. Even the most prominent and respected of the political alternatives that we can see on the horizon (and none of these has been successful in displacing the big two in the affections of the voters) are leaders who initially made their reputations three if not four decades ago.

Simply put, Bangladesh has failed to produce any credible national political leader in the past 25 years. And it is this fact, and this fact alone, that accounts for the continuing popularity of the political dynasties.

These dynasties, after all, were not always dynasties. Neither Sheikh Mujibur Rahman nor Ziaur Rahman owed their political fortunes to their antecedents, and if a credible new leader arises, there is no reason to think that he or she will not be similarly successful in establishing himself or herself in the hearts and minds of the population. Calling Generation Bangladesh.

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